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11 September 1983

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Downward Spiral in Lebanon

1. The course of events over the past three months has progressively undermined the Gemayel government. Gemayel, even if willing to accord the non-Christian Lebanese majority greater participation in governing Lebanon, cannot deliver the Christian right--his father, the Phalange Party, and the Lebanese Forces militia. Lebanese Forces criticism of Gemayel's stewardship is again growing.

25X1

2. The Army cannot impose order or consensus upon rival factions who increasingly regard the central government as a Maronite Christian entity.

25X1

3. The optimum time for national consensus has passed. The various factions in Lebanon--who have lived with de facto partition since the civil war in 1975-76--will not accept central government good faith until the Lebanese Forces militia is disarmed, a move Amin and the Army are unwilling to undertake. The Druze are already fighting and leftist Muslim militiamen--Shia and Sunni--have rearmed and are girding to combat any Christian advances into non-Christian areas of Beirut. Shia Amal leader Nabih Barri may still be willing to talk, but his militiamen will not lay down their arms unless the Lebanese Forces do so first.

25X1

4. Except for the Army, the various forces in Lebanon either regard Amin as too weak to keep his word or oppose him. Israel believes Amin has become irrelevant and is cutting deals with various factions. The Lebanese Forces almost certainly is working with Israel behind Amin's back. Druze, Sunni, and Shia militias are either working with Syria against the central government or preparing to do so. Some PLO fighters have joined the Druze in the mountains and are trying to infiltrate back into West Beirut.

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5. Israel's security is not in question. Israeli Defense Forces can remain south of the Awwali River indefinitely and thereby protect Israel's northern border, although the Israelis

25X1

NESA M#83-10221X

25X1

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SECRET

25X1

will continue to suffer casualties. Syrian and PLO involvement with the fighting in the Shuf and Alayh regions may at some point trigger Israeli airstrikes or artillery shelling, but only a blatant Syrian move in force on Beirut would be likely to prompt an Israeli return north of the Awwali. [REDACTED]

25X1

6. The Israelis will continue to supply the Christians in the hope that they can at least salvage a Marounistan mini-state, but they are unlikely to fight the battle for the Maronites. They will maintain contacts with the Druze in the hope of blunting PLO or Syrian gains and will avoid heavy-handed use of force against the Druze that would alienate the Israeli Druze population. [REDACTED]

25X1

7. As the fighting continues, Syrian leverage over the non-Christian factions--who need arms to compete in the Lebanese free-for-all--is growing. Syria is engaged in a form of brinkmanship, calculating that its indirect role will not provoke Israeli or US retaliation. We believe that Assad feels he can maintain pressure on Gemayel, weaken the Lebanese Forces militia, and undermine prospects for a Lebanese Army deployment without significantly increasing Syria's role. Official Lebanese sources report that pro-Syrian Palestinian units have participated in the fighting around Suq al Gharb. It is likely that Syrian officers are leading or advising these units. [REDACTED]

25X1

8. Barring major Druze setbacks, large-scale Syrian military participation in the current fighting is unlikely. Syria wants a government beholden to Damascus that would serve Syrian security interests, but we do not believe the Syrians need or are prepared to march on Beirut to achieve this objective. Assad wants to avoid prompting an Israeli military response or an expanded US military role in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

25X1

9. A firm US policy of immediate retaliation for attacks or shelling on MNF contingents together with an unequivocal warning to Assad probably would restrain Syrian or Druze deliberate targeting of the Marines. It would not deter shelling of Lebanese Army units, some of which are near Marine positions. [REDACTED]

25X1

10. A more combative US posture could preserve the LAF position in Suq al Gharb, but we do not believe it would significantly deter long-range Christian or Druze fighting in the Shuf and Alayh districts, where Christians and Druze will slaughter each other in a battle for turf regardless of Syrian, US, or Israeli involvement. The United States cannot forge national reconciliation if the Lebanese themselves are unwilling to forego the gun barrel for the negotiating table. [REDACTED]

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NESA M#83-10221X

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